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WILLIAM ELDERTON: ELIZABETHAN ACTOR AND
BALLAD-WRITER *

BY HYDER E. ROLLINS

When Ritson's *Bibliographia Poetica* appeared, readers must have been struck by the exaggerated prominence there given to William Elderton with three full pages of text, while Bishop Hall, Gabriel Harvey, and Shakespeare were allotted only half a page and Thomas Middleton was dismissed with three lines. Most of Ritson's three pages was made up of entries copied from the Registers of the Stationers' Company, the importance of which he was among the first to recognize; but he had also discovered two or three allusions to Elderton that piqued his curiosity. "There is no collection of Elderton's songs," Ritson remarked in another work,¹ "of which no more than one or two are known to be preserved." This remark makes all the more inexplicable his disproportionate treatment of Elderton, unless he was trying to rescue from threatened oblivion a writer whom he thought had once been an important literary figure; and certainly neither his nor any other of the brief, inaccurate sketches of Elderton's life and work that have since appeared serves to show his importance or to explain the causes of the enormous popularity which all agree was Elderton's and which, apparently, all take on hearsay.

Since Ritson's death many additional ballads by Elderton have been discovered; the indefatigable Collier noted various facts about a few ballads and discussed a phase or two of Elderton's relations with the Elizabethan stage; the *Dictionary of National Biography* has summarized in one page all the facts heretofore known about Elderton. But from a fresh examination of the entire field many new facts now come to light, which, here first

* The 88 Elizabethan ballads of the Britwell Court Library (often referred to in this paper) were sold on December 16, 1919, at the Christie Miller Sale to Mr. G. D. Smith, of New York, for £6,400. According to the London newspapers they were destined for the Elizabethan Club at Yale.

¹ *Ancient Songs*, 1820, I, xcvi.

given, form a fairly coherent story of Elderton's life and fully account for his fame.

What is apparently the first record of the ballad-writer dates from 1552, when, as Collier discovered, one Elderton took part in the Christmas festivities held at the Court of Edward VI. George Ferrers, a celebrated actor and writer for the stage, acted the part of the Lord of Misrule. A John Smyth was his "heir apparent," and Seame, Parkins, and Elderton were his second, third, and fourth "sons." The four sons were elaborately dressed in long fools' coats of crimson taffeta and white saracenet garnished with tinsel, gold or yellow satin, the costumes costing fifteen pounds, five shillings, fourpence.² At this time, when Elderton may have been a professional actor, he appears also as a married man with a son, William, born in January, 1548.

The parish Register of St. Peter's upon Cornhill, London, I have noticed, records on January 16, 1548, the "Christning of William Elderton sonne. . . ." The entry cannot refer to Elderton's own birth, for his first ballad was licensed in 1559, and even William Elderton can hardly have produced a ballad like "The Pangs of Love" at the age of twelve. One may reasonably believe that it records the baptism of William Elderton, son of William Elderton. If this be accepted, other facts of interest about the ballad-monger may be gleaned from the parish register: namely, that his wife, Grace Clearton, was buried on November 9, 1553, and his servant, Steven Riche, on December 8, almost a year after Elderton's appearance at the Court Revels.³ The three entries undoubtedly refer to one family, and as no other use of the name Elderton occurs in this register, the probability that our ballad-monger is referred to is greatly strengthened. Elderton was by no means a common name.

In the absence of further records, what Elderton did next, or who he was, is a mystery.⁴ It is natural to suppose that he continued acting. Nor can there be certainty as to the date of his

² Kempe's *Losely MSS.*, pp. 47-48.

³ "Burying of Grace Clearton wif to Mr. Eldertone" and "Burying of Steuen Riche, Mr. Eldertones seruant," run these entries.

⁴ "One Elderton" and "one Thomas Elderton, esquier," are mentioned in the *Acts of the Privy Council* (ed. Dasent, iv, 393; vi, 343) during 1554 and 1558.

first ballad. The first of which a copy remains, "The Pangs of Love and Lovers' Fits," was printed by Richard Lant on March 22, 1560. Though showily adorned with classical allusions so dear to the heart of ballad-mongers and their readers, this is a creditable production, smoothly flowing in verse and written in a measure that was for years imitated. Elderton's reputation was almost made by his first effort. Perhaps he awoke one morning to find himself famous; but, unfortunately, he did not continue to write lyrics, preferring instead to begin, or to take part in, controversies with his fellow-writers, or to put current events into rhyme.⁵

A poetical flying between Thomas Churchyard and Thomas Camell that had amused London in 1552 was temporarily resurrected in 1560, when seventeen of the broadsides were collected, it is thought by Churchyard himself, and published as *The Contention bettwyxe Churchyard and Camell*. It seems more probable that Elderton published "A Decree betwene Churchyarde and Camell," a broadside of one hundred and thirty-two lines, after this volume appeared than that he entered the original fly-

⁵ A unique copy of "The Pangs," dated March 22, 1559/60, is preserved in Mr. Christie Miller's library at Britwell Court, Buckinghamshire (reprinted in J. P. Collier's *Old Ballads*, Percy Society, 1840, I, 25 ff., and in H. L. Collmann's *Ballads and Broadsides*, 1912, No. 39). It was, however, registered for publication during the year 1558-59 (Arber's *Transcript of the Stationers' Registers*, I, 96), and what is very probably a copy of this first edition is preserved in George Bannatyne's Scottish ms. (ed. Murdoch, Hunterian Club, III, 612). This ms. copy, not before ascribed to Elderton, has an additional final stanza not found on the printed broadside, and is signed "Finis quod ane Inglisman."

The ballad was licensed for publication again on December 14, 1624. Quotations, imitations, or allusions will be found in various ballad entries at Stationers' Hall during 1561-62 and 1564-65 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 181, 270); in the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis* of 1567 (ed. Mitchell, Scottish Text Society, pp. 209 ff., 213 ff.); in Lilly's *Collection of Seventy-Nine Ancient Ballads*, pp. 30, 42; in the interlude of *The Trial of Treasure* (Dodsley-Hazlitt's *Old Plays*, III, 293); in *The Enterlude of Horestes*, 1567 (Brandl's *Quellen*, pp. 513 ff.); the *Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, 1582 (Dodsley-Hazlitt's *Old Plays*, VI, 198); *A Handfull of Pleasant Delights*, 1584 (ed. Arber, p. 25); Rich's *Greene's News*, 1593 (ed. McKerrow, p. 58); *Laugh and Lie Downe*, 1605 (Collier's *Bibliographical and Critical Account*, I, 454); Jonson's *Magnetic Lady*, 1632, IV, III; *Romeo and Juliet*, II, IV; Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, 1602 (*Works*, ed. Bullen, I, 61); Robert Armin's *Two Maids of Moreclacke*, 1609, sig. C 3 b.

ting;⁶ and his belated contribution may be aimed at in George Gascoigne's caustic remark, "The contentions passed in verse long sithence between maister *Churchyard* and *Camell* were (by a blockheaded reader) cōstrued to be a quarell betwene two neighbors."⁷ The broadside concludes with the plea:

Take me to the best, as one to you vnknown
Whose worthy wyts I do cōmend & work wt you be one:
Not mindyng so assuredly to spende and waste the daye
To make the people laugh at me, & here I make astaye.

This modest wish was soon to be granted: Elderton's aspiration was fully realized, and not only during his lifetime but for a century after his death he and his "ale-crammed nose" made people roar with laughter. Interest in the Churchyard-Camell controversy died with the publication of the volume; but Elderton's ballad-contribution started him on the way toward becoming the leading man in his profession.

In the course of his "Decree" Elderton quotes Cato and translates the passage,—fairly good evidence that he knew Latin, although this erudition he may have borrowed from Camell's own broadsides. But however this smattering of Latin was secured, in a later ballad he discusses the philosophy of Menander, Chilo, Plutarch, Periander, Socrates, and Sophocles! In "A New Merry News" he makes a further display of Latin, and introduces with some assurance of manner various mythological personages; while in "The Pangs of Love" there is a direct borrowing from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and several apparent borrowings from the *Metamorphoses*. On the whole, Elderton's ballads show a decided fund of information and a sureness of language indicative of some education.

⁶ The broadside is quoted lavishly in Collier's *Bibliographical Account*, I, 135, but I cannot find it. Mr. A. W. Pollard, to whom I applied for help in locating the sheet, refers me to E. G. Duff's *Handlist, 1501-1557*, where the sheet in question is referred to only on the strength of an allusion to it in Herbert-Ames's *Typographical Antiquities*, III, 1312. Clearly Herbert had seen a copy, and there is no reason here to doubt Collier. As it was printed by Richard Harvey, whose first license was secured in 1557-58, and as it does not appear in *The Contention bettwyxte Churchyard and Camell* (a unique copy, licensed on September 20, 1560, is preserved at Britwell Court), it seems improbable that this was, as Collier believed, "Elderton's first appearance in print."

⁷ *Posies*, 1575, in *Poems*, ed. Hazlitt, I, 69.

The popularity of his ballads no doubt accounts for the disappearance of most of the fragile sheets on which they were printed. It is impossible to give a complete Elderton canon! The Stationers' Registers themselves furnish evidence that many of his ballads were not licensed, or at least that no record was made of the licensing; and other works of his, entered in the Registers, have disappeared; so that, while Elderton's productivity was undoubtedly great, a comparatively small number of his ballads has been preserved. For the year July, 1561, to July, 1562, occurs this typical entry:

h shyngleton Recevyd of *heugh shyngleton* for his lycense
for pryntinge a ballett intituled *Eldertons*
Jestes with his mery Toyes. *iiij*^d*

Here Elderton's name occurs in the Registers for the first time; but the frequency of its occurrence in later pages is evidence of his personal popularity. As a usual thing the Registers do not indicate the authors of ballads, and even the famous writers Deloney and Parker are seldom (Deloney indeed is only once) mentioned in the entries of their ballads.

"Elderton's Jests with his Merry Toys" has not survived, but it had been printed only a few days when John Alde paid fourpence for a license to print "An Admonition to Elderton to Leave the Toys by him Begun."⁹ To this ballad Elderton promptly replied, doubtless in a scurrilous manner; and the reply was unlicensed, for in the list of fines imposed by the Company during the year 1561-62 there is a notice of a fine of five shillings paid by Thomas Colwell for having printed two ballads, "The Overthrow to the Dispraise of Hay the Gye" and "Elderton's Answer for his Merry Toys."¹⁰ His next work was a ballad, now lost, called "The Parrot."¹¹

In 1562 also appeared Elderton's "Gods of Love,"¹² a ballad

* Arber's *Transcript*, I, 179.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180. On the very next page of the Register this "Admonition" was re-entered as a "ballett."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 185.

¹¹ In 1562-63 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 199) Edmund Halley paid fourpence for a license "for pryntinge of a ballett intituled *Eldertons parratt answered &c.*"

¹² See Birch's ballad, in Collmann's *Ballads*, No. 7; it was registered in 1562-63, and during the same year "the answer to the iiijth ballett made

that equalled in popularity the earlier "Pangs of Love." Only four lines are preserved, and those four, appropriately enough, in the mouth of Benedick, who in *Much Ado About Nothing* sings:

The god of love
That sits above,
And knows me, and knows me,
How pitiful I deserve.

The authorship of "The Gods" is well established, however, thanks to an extant ballad by William Birch entitled "The complaint of a sinner, vexed with paine, After W[illiam] E[lderton] moralized," where the opening lines are:

The God of loue, that sits aboue,
Doth know vs, Doth know vs,
How sinfull that we bee:
Sent his word, the two edge sword
To shew vs, To shew vs,
Our sin and iniquitie.

Parodies, allusions, and imitations without number can be observed. Elderton's rivals eagerly took advantage of his success. When the ballad had been in the streets only a few days, the printer Griffith licensed "the answeare to the iiijth ballett made to the godes of loue"; another printer got out "The Joy of Virginitie, to the Gods of Love"; and Alexander Lacy secured a license for "The Gods of Love" (the first actual mention of Elderton's own ballad in the Registers) in 1567-68, preparatory to reprinting it. So popular was the ballad that George Turberville, then the leading poet in London, wrote a poem in open imitation of it for his own *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs, and Sonnets*. Adaptations of "The

to the godes of loue" was licensed. "The complaynte of a lover beyng vexed with payne &c," "A Dysparate synner sored Wexed with payne," "The lamentation of a synner," and "Ye Lamentacon of a sinner oppressed with payne yet hoping by Gods mercy pardon to obtayn," moralizations entered for publication at various times, were all connected with Elderton's ballad; but it first appears by name in 1567-68, when Alexander Lacy registered a ballad called "the gods of love &c." (For all these entries see Arber's *Transcript*, I, 205, 271, 307, 355; II, 377.)

Quotations and allusions occur in *Much Ado*, v, ii; Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, 1874, II, 32; *A Handfull of Pleasant Delights*, ed. Arber, p. 36; *Bacchus' Bountie*, 1593 (*Harleian Miscellany*, II, 293); Turberville's *Epitaphs, Epigrams*, etc., 1567 (Collier's reprint, pp. 28 ff.); Thomas Howell's "A Dreame" in his *Deuises* (Sir Walter Raleigh's ed., pp. 80 ff.).

Gods" are sung in *Bacchus' Bounty* (1593) and in Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the Exchange*.

Just after this ballad was printed, Thomas Brice, a preacher who did not fear to fight the Devil with his own weapons, wrote a ballad "Against Filthy Writing and Such Like Delighting,"¹³ openly rebuking a ballad-writer, who had formerly been his friend, for dilating on the supremacy in human life of Cupid and Venus.

What meane the rimes that run thus large in euery shop to sell?
With wanton sound and filthie sense . . .
Tel me is Christ, or Cupide Lord? doth God or Venus reigne?

he asks. As Elderton was pre-eminently the versifier of love and passion, and as he had just finished glorifying the might of the Gods of Love, there seems little doubt that Brice's attack was levelled at him.

I wishe you well I doo protest, (as God will, I will so)
I cannot helpe, as frend ye wot, nor will not hurt as so.
But for the vile corrupting rimes, which you confesse to wrighte
My soule and hart abhorres their sence, as far from my delight.
And those that vse them for their glee, as you doo vaunte ye will
I tell you plainly what I think, I iudge thee to bee ill.
This boasting late in part hath causd, mee now to say my minde
Though chalenges of yours also, in euery place I finde.

Small wonder if Elderton's head had been turned by success and if his boasting had provoked Brice's resentment. Later writers, in attacks on Elderton that came with increasing frequency, united in accusing him of vanity and boasting; but Brice's puritanical tirade may in some degree account for Elderton's change from amatory lyrics to journalism.

Up to 1562 little has been discovered about the ballad-writer. More facts are now obtainable, though some of them are a bit incongruous with ballad-writing. In his *Survey of London* (1598)¹⁴ John Stowe, describing the Guildhall, wrote:

Last of all a stately porch entering the great hall was erected, the front thereof towards the south being beautified with images of stone, such as is shewed by these verses following, made some 30. yeares since, by *William Elderton*, at that time [1568] an Atturney in the Sheriffes courtes there.

¹³ Registered in 1561-62 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 181); reprinted in Collier's *Old Ballads*, p. 49, and Collmann's *Ballads and Broad-sides*, p. 36.

¹⁴ P. 217.

Though most the images be pulled downe,
 And none be thought remaine in towne,
 I am sure there be in London yet,
 Seuen images such and in such a place,
 As few or none I thinke will hit,
 Yet euery day they shew their face,
 And thousands see them euery yeare,
 But few I thinke can tell me where,
 Where Iesu Christ aloft doth stand,
 Law and learning on either hand,
 Discipline in the Deuils necke,
 And hard by her are three direct,
 There Iustice, Fortitude & Temperance stand,
 Where find ye the like in all this land?

Stowe was exceptionally well informed on London and its people. It is impossible that he was unacquainted, at least by reputation, with Elderton, who in 1598 had been dead only some eight years. If he had meant another Elderton than the far-famed balladist, he would have said so explicitly. Furthermore, if Stowe had been in error, the editors of the *Survey* (among whom was Elderton's friend and crony, Antony Munday) would after Stowe's death surely have changed the statement. Fortunately, however, I have found in a jotting in the diary of Henry Machyn, a London citizen, for August, 1562, additional proof that Elderton was an attorney in the Guildhall court:

The vj day of August was reynyd [arraigned] at Yeld-Hall vij, vj for qwynnyng [counterfeiting]; iiij was cast for deth, Thomas Wylford, Thomas Barow. . . . Maltby, Phelipe Furney gold-smyth, and ij fr[eely] qwytt; and ther satt a-pone them my lord justice Chamley, ser Recherd Sakefeld, the master of the rolles, [Sir Martin] Bowes, ser Wylliam Garett, ser William Huett, master re[corder], master Surcott, and master Chydley, and master Eldertun.¹⁸

If, then, Elderton was an attorney in the Sheriff's Court in 1562, when Machyn wrote, and about 1568, as Stowe asserts, his social position and education must have been better than is usually thought. Perhaps he began ballad-writing only for diversion—and lawyers have done many things worse than composing a

¹⁸ *Diary of Henry Machyn*, Camden Society, 1848, p. 290. In *The Practise of the Sheriffs Court of London*, 1867, pp. 3-5, we are informed that there are two sheriffs who hold court at the Guildhall, each having eight attorneys who attend the court.

"Pangs of Love"! At any rate it is a curious coincidence that from 1562 to 1569 only one ballad from his pen can be traced. This, to be sure, is on a grotesque subject particularly redolent of ballad-mongerism; but in writing it Attorney Elderton's purpose may actually have been the conscientious purpose of warning England to repent. The broadside was entitled "The true fourme and shape of a monsterous Chyld, Which was borne in Stony Stratforde, in North Hamptonshire The yeare of our Lord M.CCCC.LXV,"¹⁶ and was ornamented with two woodcuts showing the "fore and backe" parts of the monstrosity. It is really a news-item, not a true ballad, most of the sheet being filled with a prose description, after which come three six-line stanzas of verse to enforce the moral that in this child God had plainly meant to warn sinful persons to amendment of life.

Except for this one lapse from virtue, Elderton may have been devoting his time and talents entirely to the law. Perhaps the call of the ballad-press was too strong for him, or perhaps in 1568-69 he became involved in difficulties: one is tempted to believe so. A certain John Travers, in his will dated January 24, 1569, wrote: "Whereas I bought of Mr. *Elderton* Esq. and *Thomas Bental*, gent., a messuage in the parish of St. Michaels in Cornhill and 10 tenements in Swanne Alley. . ."¹⁷ If one could make sure that William Elderton (whose home was apparently in Cornhill) is here referred to, one could have reason for believing that Elderton had been a man of some property, that financial troubles came upon him, and that he sold his property and returned to the not unremunerative profession of ballad-writing to recoup his fortunes. But such guessing would be worse than useless.

Whatever the cause, in 1569 Elderton began to pour forth ballads, and his name frequently appears in the Registers of the Stationers' Company. In December, 1568, or January, 1569, he published "A proper new Balad in praise of my Ladie Marques,

¹⁶ Unique copy at Britwell Court (Collmann's *Ballads*, No. 43). It was apparently the "pycture of a chyld" which Thomas Colwell licensed in 1565 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 264), though if the date given in the title be correct, the child was not born until January 25, 1565/66.

¹⁷ *Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem for the City of London*, 4-19 Elizabeth, ed. S. J. Madge, Pt. II, p. 149.

whose Death is bewailed,"¹⁸ honoring his special patroness, who has been variously identified as the Marchioness of Winchester, the Marchioness of Southampton, and the Marchioness of Dorset. The stoppage of this court patronage may be the truest explanation of why Elderton resumed balladry. "A proper newe Ballad sheweinge that philosophers learnynge are full of good warnynge,"¹⁹ published at the same time as the "Lady Marques," is of the moralizing type that formed the *pièce de résistance* of ballad-mongers' repertoires—a type weighted with quotations from Plutarch, Socrates, and Sophocles.

The winter of 1569 brought stirring times to England. Catholic nobles were secretly arranging for a marriage between Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk (son of the poet Surrey), and Mary Stuart, when the queen discovered the plot, sent Norfolk to the Tower, and ordered the Earls of Westmoreland and Northumberland to come to London to explain their share in the marriage arrangements. They decided to resist, and raising an army of malcontents marched to Durham, where, as a sign of defiance to the queen, they celebrated mass in the cathedral. But the Rising in the North, as the rebellion was called, proved abortive. Lacking money and supplies, the army soon disbanded, and the earls fled to Scotland. Westmoreland succeeded in escaping to Flanders; Northumberland was betrayed to England and subsequently beheaded. A number of traditional ballads on the Northern Rebellion show the interest with which the common people followed the course of the rebel earls.²⁰

Elderton's patriotism was rampant. He felt called upon to celebrate each new defeat or execution of the rebels with a ballad glorifying the queen and abusing the pope and English Catholics. No doubt he was sincere, and it should be remembered that for a large number of people his ballads supplied the place now filled by newspapers. When he wrote for Thomas Purfoote,

¹⁸ Unique copy in the Huth Collection, British Museum (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 14). Registered in January, 1569 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 384). Cf. Hazlitt's *Handbook*, 1867, p. 178.

¹⁹ Unique copy in the Huth Collection (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 138). Registered on apparently the same day as the "Ladie Marques." Perhaps suggested by an earlier ballad, 1565, on "Good Counsel and Sayings of the Philosopher" (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 269).

²⁰ Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Nos. 175-177.

"A ballat intituled Northumberland newes,
Wherein you maye see what Rebelles do vse,"²¹

he was supplying information not otherwise obtainable. And this is his strain:

You Northcountrie nodies whie be ye so bragge
To rise and raise honor to Romish renowne
You know yt at Tiborne there standeth a Nagge
For suche as will neuer be trew to the crowne.
Come tomlinge downe, come tomlinge downe.
That will not yet be trewe to the Crowne.

In exactly similar vein, years before, had Laurence Minot and John Skelton written ballads against the Scots. For Thomas Colwell, Elderton wrote an 'extra' called "Newes from Northumberland,"²² which was registered, and presumably published, on the same day as Purfoote's "Northumberland Newes." Both of these ballads were composed immediately after the news of the defeat of the rebels had reached London. And when in January, 1570, "did suffer at Durham to the number of three score and six Constables & other, among whom, an alderman of ye towne named *Struthar*, & a priest called Parson *Plomtree* were ye most notable,"²³ Elderton wrote

"A ballad Intituled, a Newe well aday,
As playne maister Papist, as Donstable waye.
Well a daye, well a daye, well a daye woe is mee
Syr Thomas Plomtrie is hanged on a tree."²⁴

His ballad "Prepare ye to the Plowe,"²⁵ an exhortation to England

²¹ Unique copy at Britwell Court (Collmann's *Ballads*, No. 41). Registered under Elderton's name in 1569-79 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 403). Elderton's refrain was borrowed by W. Kyrkham in a ballad called "Joyfull Newes for true Subiects" (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 231).

²² Unique copy preserved in the Library of the London Society of Antiquaries (*Harleian Miscellany*, 1813, x, 267; R. Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs*, II, 210). Registered very soon, perhaps on the very day, after the "Northumberland News."

²³ Stowe's *Annals*, 1615, p. 664.

²⁴ Unique copy in the Huth Collection (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 1). Registered in a very short time after the "News from Northumberland" (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 406).

²⁵ Huth Collection (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 174). Registered in 1570 (Arber's *Transcript*, I, 410).

to support the queen loyally, soon followed. Are not the humble rhymes of this ballad-monger striking proof of Elizabeth's ability to inspire with personal devotion even her lowliest subjects?

All the ballad-writers in London, however, rivaled Elderton in castigating the rebels. During the year 1569-70 about one hundred ballads were registered for publication, and of these fully half dealt with the Rebellion or, as a corollary, attacked the Papists. In the next year, too, most of the ballads were chronicles of Catholic plots, real or suspected. One of the most sensational events is thus tersely described by Stowe:²⁶

The 25. of May [1571] in the morning, was found hanging at the bishop of Londons palace gate in Paules church-yard, a Bull, which lately had beene sent from Rome containing diuerse horrible treasons against the Queenes maiesty for the which one *John Felton* was shortly after apprehended, and committed to the Tower of London.

The Bull itself deprived the queen of all title to her kingdom, absolved her subjects from their allegiance, and threatened with excommunication any person who obeyed her commands.²⁷ Felton was condemned to death on August 4. Four days, later, on a gallows erected for that purpose in front of the Bishop's gate, he was hanged, bowelled, and quartered.

Stephen Peele, a talented balladist, immediately wrote

"A Letter to Rome to declare to the Pope
John Felton his freend is hang'd in a rope."

and then amused himself by answering this with a ballad called

"The Pope is his fury doth answer returne
To a letter ye which to Rome is late come."²⁸

Here the pope is represented as speaking in the first person, and in the course of his ravings cried out:

And I wyll curse and ban them all
That speake against my powre,
And seekes to make my kyngdome fall,
My curse shall them deuowre:

²⁶ *Annals*, p. 666.

²⁷ Strype's *Annals of the Reformation*, 1725, I, 610.

²⁸ For these ballads see Collier's *Old Ballads*, p. 65, and Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 33.

And yf that here I might you see,
 For wrytyng lately vnto mee,
 Be sure, ye should rewarded bee
 As best I could bethynke.
 And as for Wylliam Elderton
 That lately sent me worde to Rome,
 Be sure that he should haue lyke dome
 To bye him pen and ynke.

Peele, then, furnishes indisputable proof that Elderton wrote at least one ballad against the pope—without doubt he wrote many more—but there are not sufficient grounds to identify any extant ballad as Elderton's work.

In a wholly different vein is "A newe ballad entytuled Lenton stuff, for a lyttell munny ye maye have inowghe," registered in January, 1569.²⁹ But this ballad, probably suggested by the heavy penalties that a statute of Elizabeth (1562-63) had established for the non-observance of Lent, was an earlier production than the registration date indicates.

In August, 1570, Elderton published a ballad called "Doctor Stories Stumblinge into Englonde" that caused a decided sensation in court circles, brought his name before the Privy Council, and led to a re-iteration of the order that all pamphlets, ballads, and books must be licensed before publication. John Story, the subject of the ballad, was one of the most distinguished and powerful Catholics in England during the reign of Edward VI and Mary. He had also been the first Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, but his zeal for the Catholic Church made him *persona non grata* to Elizabeth. In 1563, by the connivance of the Spanish ambassador, he escaped from the prison in which she had confined him, and fled to Flanders, where he was instrumental in establishing the Antwerp Inquisition and where, after a time, he was commissioned to search for heretical English books all ships that came into Flemish ports. This commission led to his ruin. The English government planned to kidnap him, and in July, 1570, sent

²⁹ MS. Ashmole 48 (ed. Thomas Wright, *Songs and Ballads*, Roxburghe Club, pp. 12-22; old Shakespeare Society *Publications*, xxxi, 105). Cf. Rollins, "Concerning Bodleian MS. Ashmole 48," *Modern Language Notes*, xxxiv, 341.

a boat, commanded by one William Parker, to Bergen op Zoom. While Story was in the hold searching for concealed books, the crew clapped down the hatches, weighed anchor, and sailed for England. Story was landed at Yarmouth on August 11. The genuine fear and hatred that Protestants in England felt for him, as well as the grim irony in his capture, made ballads about him acceptable to court and people alike. Many such ballads were written. The Spanish ambassador, Antonio de Guaras, wrote to the Spanish government that "many burlesque verses have been printed about the kidnapping of Storey."⁸⁰ Some of these were registered at Stationers' Hall and are still preserved.

Story was treated with summary and harsh justice. Indicted for high treason on May 26, 1571, he was convicted, condemned, and, in spite of the protests of the Spanish government, executed on June 1 with revolting cruelty. Elderton's ballad, though praised as to its purpose by the Privy Council, came under their censure because it attacked nobles and princes with whom the queen was diplomatically on friendly terms, and they sent the following order:

To oꝛ lovinge friendes the Mr Wardens and Companye of
Printers and Stationers of London.

After oꝛ hartye comendacions we perceave of late a certeene Ballett hath bin sett forthe in prynt by one *William Elderton* intituled *Doctor Stories Stumblinge into Englonde* ymprinted in fflete Strete by *Thomas Colwell*. And albeit the substance thereof seemed to cause therewith a certeene zeale and good meaninge towardes the ffurtherance of trewe Religion and defacinge of Papistrie; yet do we finde that some partes of the same do particularlye touche by name certeyne pꝛsonages of honour and reputation tending also to the descreditt of some pꝛences with whom the Queene's Matie standeth presently in terms of amytie.

And therefore we have thoughte wele not onlye to give yowe knowledge thereof and to require and chardge yowe in her Mtes name that yowe do forthwith give order that none of the said balletts be uttered or solde abroade and that such of them as have been alreddie dispersed may be called in againe with as moche dylligence as may be but also do will and commande yowe that from hence forthe yowe suffer neither booke ballett nor any other matter to be published in print whatsoever the argument thereof shalbe until the same be first seene and allowed either by us of her Mtes pryvie counsell or by thee Commissioners for cawses ecclesiasticall there

⁸⁰ *Calendar of State Papers, Spanish*, II, 276.

at London. Whereunto wee earnestlye requyer yowe to have speciall regarde as yowe tender her Mtes pleasure and will answer for the contrary. So fare yowe well from Rycote the viij of September 1570.

Yor Lovinge freindes

R. Leycester.

E. Clynton.

F. Knolleys.

W. Cecill.²¹

Thomas Colwell was Elderton's favorite publisher: that, however, did not prevent his printing "Eldertons ell fortune," a work now unknown, which was undoubtedly a ballad in which a rival exulted over Elderton's reproof by the Privy Council. It is gratifying to read that for printing this work Colwell was fined fourpence! ²²

No other ballad-writer was ever victim of so much ridicule from persons of every class. A remarkable ballad (or rather libel) written against him by William Fulwood is extant. Fulwood, a merchant-tailor of London, himself wrote at least two ballads ("The Shape of ii monsters" and "A New Ballad against Unthrifths" ²³); but in his translation of Gratarolus's *Castel of Memorie*, and in *The Enimie of Idlenesse* ("a perfect platforme [showing] how to indite Epistles and Letters of all sorts," which went through nine editions between 1568 and 1621), he aspired to something higher than his native vein of balladry. In

"A Supplication to Eldertonne, for Leaches vnlewddnesse:
Desiring him to pardone, his manifest vnrudeness" ²⁴

he shows ability for knock-down-and-drag-out humor and coarse satire. The cause of his attack is not clear, as there is no copy nor any record of anything that Elderton wrote. It appears from Fulwood's remarks, however, that Leach, a London hosier, had written an insulting ballad on Elderton, that the latter had retaliated with a ballad ridiculing Leach's profession, reproaching Leach

²¹ Arber's *Transcript*, v, lxxvi. This document has been entirely overlooked by writers on Elderton's life. In *A Short Account of the Worshipfull Company of Stationers*, London, 1903, p. 46, and in Arber's *Transcript*, v, lvi, C. A. Rivington has noticed that "Dr. Story's Ballad, *Stumbling into England*, was suppressed by order of the Privy Council!"

²² Arber's *Transcript*, i, 439.

²³ They are reprinted in *A Collection of 79 Ancient Ballads*, London, 1867.

²⁴ Collmann's *Ballads and Broad-sides*, p. 139; Collier's *Old Ballads*, p. 56.

"with breache of charitie" in telling openly of his (Elderton's) vices, and declaring that, while Leach had written indecently, he himself had replied only according to the Scriptures and "in sugared sort." Fulwood wished to keep the quarrel alive, and begins by addressing "Good gentle maister Eldertonne" as if he intended to defend him. The lines that follow show that his purpose was far different.

He implores Elderton to leave his "filthy rymes" and "wicked toyes" (a phrase perhaps indicating that Fulwood wrote shortly after Elderton's "Toyes" appeared²⁵), and scoffs at him for thinking so well of his figure and for ridiculing Leach's profession:

For he may likewise cut and frame,
a case for your riche nose.

To make a hose is no suche shame,
to Leache in his degree:
As is your nose a glorious fame,
vppon your face to see.

This is the first gibe at Elderton's nose, a feature that now perhaps represents his chief claim to fame! Fulwood applies many ugly epithets to Elderton, but his most serious charge is that the ballad-writer is living in immoral relations with his "vile Jone":

But heere I must ful sore lament,
the counsel you still geue:
To your vile Ione, not to repent,
but beastly still to liue.

What shal our lot be then Oh Lord?
which foster suche foule swine:

²⁵ It is possible that Fulwood's "Supplication" was the "Admonition to Elderton to Leave the Toys By Him Begun" that was twice registered in June, 1561 (the month can be told approximately by the position of these entries on the page of the Registers); for the "Supplication" ends,

And thus subscribed,
The first day of Iune:
At which time you said,
Beginneth your fume.

Paul Wolter (*William Fulwood*, 1907, p. 10) remarks that the "Supplication" "wir in die Nähe des Jahres 1592 legen müssen." Elderton was dead in 1592, and furthermore Fulwood's ballad was printed by John Alde, whose last printed work was licensed for publication on November 26, 1582 (*Arber's Transcript*, v, lxxxi).

As liue a life to bee abhorde,
yet glory and ioye therein?

"And since I thus courteously entreat you, gentle Master Elderton," Fulwood concludes, "please forgive Leach." One would give much for a glimpse at Elderton's reply.

His next extant production is "An Epytaphe vppon the Death of the Right Reuerend and learned Father in God. I. Iuell, Doctor of Diuinitie and Bishop of Sa[l]isburie. Whom God called to his marcie the .22. of September. 1571,"³⁶—an attempt at pure elegiac poetry. Jewell, bishop of Salisbury from January 21, 1560, to his death, was widely mourned. Stowe declares him to have been "a most eloquent and diligent preacher, but a far more painefull and studious writer, as his workes remaining beare witnesse, whereby his fame shall neuer die."³⁷

An elegy of a different kind formed his next effort. Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, after nearly three years of imprisonment, was beheaded for high treason on June 2, 1572. In "A Balad intituled the Dekaye of the Duke,"³⁸ Elderton admits that,

To tell the hole treatise, the tale were to longe,
Against the good ladie, our Queene, that now raignes,
How many devises to do her grace wronge,
By pope holie practise were pact in his braines,

though personally he had some sympathy for the Duke and took pains to tell that only pernicious Catholic influence was responsible for his decay.

As the Stationers' Registers for the period from July, 1571, to July, 1576, are lost, it is impossible to trace Elderton's ballads during this interval; but much of the time he was devoting to the

³⁶ Britwell Court Library (Collmann's *Ballads*, No. 42; Collier's *Book of Roxburghe Ballads*, p. 139; *Select Poetry of the Reign of Elizabeth*, Parker Society, II, 512). Another ballad on Jewell, written by Nicholas Bourman and printed under a title similar to Elderton's, can be seen in Collmann's *Ballads*, p. 32. The date September 22 for the Bishop's death is given by Elderton, Bourman, and Stowe (*Annals*, p. 669); but Wood (*Athen. Oxon.*, ed. Bliss, I, 395) and John Ayre (*Jewell's Works*, 1845, II, 512) give the date September 23.

³⁷ *Annals*, p. 669.

³⁸ Unique copy in the Society of Antiquaries (*Harleian Miscellany*, x, 270).

stage. Perhaps he had never entirely given up acting. The kind of hack-work he turned out was produced also by many actors and playwrights. Antony Munday, Thomas Preston, and Richard Mulcaster, too, loved to "ballett," as well as Churchyard and Dick Tarlton. The pitiful squibs in which Turberville and Gascoigne, Greene and Peele, Nashe and Harvey, often indulged were no better than the work of the professional ballad-mongers.

During the year 1572-73 Elderton was in charge of the Boy Actors of Eton College, a post of considerable importance that testified to his histrionic ability. With this company he gave at least one performance before the queen. From the "Declared Accounts of the Audit Office" it appears that this performance was given at Hampton Court on January 7, 1573.³⁹ "Cloth for Ruffs apornes Neckerchers & Rayles for Eldertons play" cost eleven shillings and sixpence, the making up of this material cost one shilling,⁴⁰ and two dozen gloves were furnished at an expense of two and eight.⁴¹

The Eton children do not seem to have given further performances; and a year later Elderton had become master of the Children of Westminster School.⁴² Among the "Playes shoven at whytehall" in 1574 was "Truth, ffaythfulnesse, & Mercye, playde by the Children of westminster for Elderton vpon New yeares daye at night there."⁴³ The play was "all fytte and ffurnyshed with the store of thoffice"⁴⁴ of the Master of the Revels, and on January 10 Elderton received from the queen the customary reward of six pounds, thirteen and four.⁴⁵ From 1564 to 1574 the Children of Westminster had frequently played at court, but after this performance in 1574 nothing further is heard of them until 1606.⁴⁶

³⁹ Wallace's *Evolution of the English Drama*, p. 214.

⁴⁰ Cunningham's *Revels*, p. 42; Feuillerat's *Documents*, p. 180; *Modern Language Review*, II, 5.

⁴¹ Feuillerat's *Documents*, p. 174.

⁴² His name, however, does not appear in the publications of Westminster, such as the *List of Queen's Scholars and Masters of Westminster School*, 1852.

⁴³ Cunningham's *Revels*, p. 51; Feuillerat's *Documents*, p. 193.

⁴⁴ Feuillerat, p. 193.

⁴⁵ Wallace's *Evolution*, p. 215; Dasent's *Acts of the Privy Council*, VIII, 178.

⁴⁶ Murray's *English Dramatic Companies*, I, 349 f.

Nor does Elderton again appear as the head, or as a member, of any dramatic company.

As there are no records (even after the Stationers' Registers have again begun) of Elderton's having done further ballad-writing before 1577, it seems very probable that after his two court productions he continued to act. Collier⁴⁷ gave him credit for inventing a popular sort of dramatic entertainment for the *habitués* of London taverns. Elderton, he thought, was in the habit of going from tavern to tavern and indulging in impromptu burlesque songs and dances, which depended for their appeal on the comicality of his acting and the sheer nonsense of his lines. One of his performances (which was certainly not impromptu) has been preserved, a rimed work entitled

" A New merry Newes,
As merry as can bee,
From Italy, Barbary,
Turkie, and Candee."⁴⁸

It begins with a list of the gods whom "Poets for pleasure haue pretily fained" to have reigned, and tells that the gods appointed Saint Martin to be lieutenant of the vintners. But a quarrel soon arose "about the colouring of noses and faces," so that the gods decided it to be

most expedient for you citizens all,
to be vnder the gouernment of coppersmiths hall;

whereupon the vintners made supplication. "The Vintners Supplication" (the title of the next division) gives this interesting enumeration of London taverns,

There hath beene great sale and vtterance of wine,
Besides Beere and Ale, and Ipocrasse fine,
In euery countrey, Region and nation,

⁴⁷ *History of English Dramatic Poetry*, III, 210-212.

⁴⁸ The 1606 edition is reprinted in Hazlitt's *Fugitive Poetical Tracts, 1600-1700*, No. 9, from the unique copy at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Part of the "Merry News" is literally taken over in Richard West's *News from Bartholomew Fair* (1606), a unique but fragmentary copy of which is in the Bodleian Library. West's *News* appears to me unmistakably to be a burlesque elegy on Elderton: the poem is throughout a mock-lament for the death of "Nose Maximus," and West's lavish borrowings from Elderton's "Merry News" add point to the burlesque.

But chiefly in London, at the *Salutation*;
 And at the *Bore's head*, hard by London stone;
 And the *swan* at Dowgat, a tauerne well knowne;

The *Myter* in Cheape; and then the *Bull head*,
 And many like places to make Noses red.
 The *castel* in Fish-street, *three Cranes* in the *Vintry*,
 And now of late at *S. Martins* in the *Sentry*,—

and concludes with the petition,

May it therefore please your godheads of mercy & pitie,
 To appoynt some officers in euery citie,
 To apprehend, arrest, and attach in all places,
 All such as haue any mettall in their faces,
 And that euery man arested in such manner
 Shall carry the kan vnder the Vintners banner.

And one who refuses to do this is to be banished from the taverns, have his coat sold, and to be readmitted only when he agrees to be a good follow. "The end of this Supplication" informs us that Bacchus was much pleased, and ordered "the Coppersmiths in euery land, that they should be the Vintners ayd." "Heere followeth the Commission sent to the Copper-smiths," in which it is said that in England, Spain, Barbary, Turkey, Candee, and elsewhere there remain

As goodly red noses and faces as can be.
 With pimple and pumple to furnish the place,
 To set forth the glory of the nose and the face,
 With colours most liuely and lusty of hew,
 As crimsen in graine, purple and blew.
 Be it therefore enacted and made,
 That such as doe vse the Vintners trade,
 And shall heereafter see any one passe,
 Hard by his doore with copper or brasse,
 In any part of his nose or his face,
 He shall fill a quart, and hie him apace,
 Strait for to greet him,
 As soone as they meete him,
 With a cup of good wine,
 To keepe his colour fine,
 Vpon paine for to lose,
 The custome of a copper nose.

It was further enacted that all persons honor their guests according to the metal in their faces, be it crimson, purple, or blue. The next division, "The Armes," provides a suitable coat-of-arms for

these coppersmiths, and stipulates that apprentices who have carried "wine-pots for yeares two or three" be released as soon as they are able to show a red nose. But for one who wishes to "claime the freedome of the Old Hance" the requirements are more rigid,—

His nose must be as ragged as a rocke,
Full of blew veines, of an antient stocke,

and he must swear before the Company never to give up the wine-pot. "The Oath" is next given. It provides for an annual dinner by the Company, to be preceded by "a generall procession" in which the Nose autem, Nose Gloriare, Libra Nose, Ne Nose, Iustifica Nose, Letifica Nose, Salua Nose, and O Beata Nose take prominent part. Any one who fails to march in the procession shall forfeit to the company "all the mettell in his face." "Here followeth a song," which concludes the performance, of Jenkin and his wife, Jenkin being thus described:

His Nose was like a Copper pan,
and that was very gay:
When Ienkin and his wife was wed,
they had no light to go to bed,
But as God would Ienkins nose was red,
and led them both the way.

These verses, no doubt made more amusing by the shining copper nose of the reciter and the queer contortions and grimaces with which he spoke them, have far more merit than Collier suspected, and indeed are up to the standard of most modern vaudeville entertainments. In the hands of a capable actor, the "New Merry News" would undoubtedly be quite as amusing to an audience as anything that is now whirling around the Keith or Majestic circuits! Undoubtedly in this piece, although it has not been realized before, originated the tradition of the redness of Elderton's nose. He made capital out of his own facial peculiarity, as vaudeville and musical-comedy actors do to-day; and the great popularity of his "Merry News" made it impossible to think of him without thinking also, to use the words of Nashe,⁴⁹ of his "parliament of noses." The "Merry News" first appeared about 1576, was reprinted in 1606, 1616, 1626, and 1660, so that for a century

⁴⁹ *Works*, ed. McKerrow, I, 256.

it was familiar to readers. With this poem in mind, Nashe, classifying the English poets, mentions that "a fift of an enflamed heale to copper-smithes hal, all to beerimes it of the diuersitie of red noses, and the hierarchy of the nose magnificat";⁵⁰ while William Webb bitterly observed how "euery one that can frame a Booke in Ryme, though for want of matter it be but in commendations of Copper noses or Bottle Ale, wyll catch at the Garlande due to Poets."⁵¹

It is extremely likely that Elderton wrote and acted in jigs, the ballad-farces with which Elizabethan stage-performances customarily closed. No evidence to this effect, apart from that suggested by the "Merry News," is, however, to be found; and the lines in the so-called "Tarlton's Jig of a Horse-Load of Fools" (clearly fabricated to fit quite an erroneous idea of what a jig actually was), which have been interpreted as meaning that Elderton wrote jigs and "pastorals" for the players, must be disregarded.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 177.

⁵¹ Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, 246.

⁵² The "Jig" referred to is preserved in J. P. Collier's oft-quoted ms. of the "Reign of James I" (now British Museum Addit. ms. 32, 380, fols. 83-90; another copy made by Collier is in Addit. ms. 32, 381). It was first printed by Halliwell-Phillips in his edition of *Tarlton's Jests*, Shakespeare Society, 1844, pp. xx-xxvi. Fleay (*Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, I, 163) identified in the "Jig" Stephen Gosson, Gascoigne, and, in the following stanzas, Elderton:

This one perchance might know
 By his dresse and his shape,
 Squeaking, gibbering of everie degree;
 Is a poett, or if he is not soe,
 He is a poet ape:
 They are of the same familie.
 He has got of scollershippe
 The redd carrott nose
 Squeaking, &c.
 With drinking sacke and canarie
 At the Hat or the Rose:
 Of a rare wine-bibing familie.
 Yet some times he must stint him selfe
 And live on a leeke,
 Squeaking, &c.

While Elderton was amusing the *habitués* of taverns and adding copper to his already coppery nose, his name had some influence in the world of letters. And "Claudius Holyband Scholemaster teaching in Paules Churcheyarde by the Signe of the Lucrece" published his *Pretie and wittie Historie of Arnalt and Lucenda* (1575), with no other poetical sponsor than eight complimentary, but extremely stupid, verses headed "Elderton to the Boke":

Let neuer Zoilus thee accuse:
The wisest head at thee may muse,
For vertue is adorned by thee,
And chaunces shewen that wretched be.
As he that reades this Historie,
And wisely markes the myserie,
Shall finde therin the due report,
That longeth to the wisest sort.⁵³

Ten years before, George Gascoigne had contributed verses to Holyband's *French Littleton*. Of a "ballad against marriage," published by Thomas Colwell in 1575 and attributed to Elderton,⁵⁴ nothing is now known. But anti-matrimonial ballads were a staple of news; so that one is hardly warranted to find in the title of Colwell's ballad proof of Elderton's disgust with his "vile Jone"!

On April 19, 1577, Richard Jones registered Elderton's "An-

The while he writeth pastoralls
For us players to speake:
Of a right lying familie.

Or makes by the bushell madrigals
Or ballades for to sell,
Squeaking, &c.

I, his father, can make them allmost
O' the suddaine quite as well:
Of a verie ballatting familie.

The "Jig" is undoubtedly a modern fabrication, which has no correspondence whatever with genuine Elizabeth jigs. Cf. Rollins, in *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, xxx, 375, 377.

⁵³ These lines, which have not before been reprinted, apparently do not occur in later editions of the book; cf. *Censura Literaria*, 2d ed., vi, 52.

⁵⁴ By Ames, *Typographical Antiquities*, ed. Herbert, II, 932. In Robert Watts's *Bibliotheca Britannica* and several similar works it is, peculiarly enough, only this lost ballad that is entered under Elderton's name.

swer to the Whipping of the Cat,"⁵⁵ a reply, not extant, to a ballad called "The Grinding of the Hatchet and Whipping the Cat" registered by Hugh Jackson in the preceding October. More than a year later, on September 25, 1578, Jones licensed "Eldertons solace in tyme of his sickness conteyning sundrie sonnetes uppon many pithie paraboles."⁵⁶ As the license cost eightpence this was evidently a book of some size. How unfortunate that it is not preserved! for Elderton's "sickness" may have been a euphemism for "imprisonment," and it would be illuminating to learn with what pithy parables he was able to lighten the gloom of his gaol. Perhaps he was so imprudent as to expatiate on the power of money—which he then lacked—to corrupt gaolers and to open barred doors!

What offense Elderton had committed does not appear: likely enough he had displeased the authorities with something in his ballads, or he may have been arrested for debt. In March, 1579, he was a prisoner in the Counter, whence he notified the Privy Council that a certain Harding, who some four years earlier had been imprisoned for counterfeiting, had secured his release by bribing the gaolers; whereupon the Council ordered a prompt investigation of Elderton, other prisoners in the Counter, and Harding himself.⁵⁷ How long Elderton remained in prison cannot be

⁵⁵ Arber's *Transcript*, II, 311.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338. This is the only work of Elderton's named in Nathan Drake's account of Elderton in *Shakespeare and His Times*, p. 330.

⁵⁷ This entry in the *Acts of the Privy Council* (ed. Dasent, XI, 78) has not before been pointed out:

(March 26, 1578/9)

"To the Shreifes of London, Mr. — Owen and Mr. Thomas Norton, that where by the report of one William Elderton, Androwes and Pryme, prisoners in the Counter, there hath bene some speches uttered there that one Harding, committed prisoner about fower yeres past to the Counter for clipping of coyne, was discharged for the giving of c⁴ [£100], the which matter tending to the corrupcion of some that weare at that tyme putt in trust, their Lordships think convenient that the said Commissioners shall nowe presentlie repaire to the Compter, where the prisoners aforesaid be, and to examyne them uppon that point; and likewise to calle before them the said Harding, who is thought to be about the Cittie, and to examyne him of the maner of his discharge out of prison."

The two Compters, in Fleet Street and Woodstreet, were especially devoted to debtors. Cf. Fulwood's "Ballad against Unthrifths" (Lilly's *Ballads*, p. 153):

determined, but he was evidently released soon after the Privy Council's investigation, for his "Newe Ballade, declaryng the daungerous Shootyng of the Gunne at the Courte"⁵⁸ deals with events that happened on July 17, 1579.

On that day, Stowe tells us, "that Q[ueen's] maiestie, being on ye riuer of Thamis betwixt her highnes mannor of Greenewich and Detford, in her priuie barge, accompanied with the French Ambassador, the E[arle] of Lincolne, and master vizchamberlaine,"⁵⁹ Thomas Appletree, a young fellow in another boat, carelessly fired a gun across the river, and a bullet passed within five feet of the queen, wounding one of her bargemen. "For ye which fact," Stowe continues, "the said *Thomas* being apprehended & condemned to death: was on the 21. of July brought to the water side, where was a gibbet set vp, directly placed betweene Detford and Greenewich, & when the hangman had put the rope about his necke, he was by the queenes most gracious pardon deliuered from execution."

The ballad agrees so closely with Stowe's account that *it* might well be the source of his information! Everything indicates that the people were considerably stirred by the impending execution of Appletree, who had been merely careless, not maliciously criminal, and that the reprieve was granted by the queen more as a matter of policy than from kind-heartedness. The Privy Council exercised a rigid censorship over publications about the affair. On July 24 H. Bynneman licensed two tracts dealing with Appletree *sub manibus comitum Leicester et Hunsdon*, the fee for each license being sixpence, twopence more than usual. But Elderton's ballad, innocuous and loyal beyond question, was not licensed, and its publisher, Edward White, was consequently fined twelvecence.

"Then some the Counter oft doo kisse,
If that the money be not paid."

An interesting account of how prisoners for debt were treated is given in *Wonderfull Strange Newes from Woodstreet Counter*, 1642, especially on sig. A 4 b.

⁵⁸ Unique copy in the Society of Antiquaries (*Harleian Miscellany*, x, 272). See Arber's *Transcript*, II, 357, 358, 850.

⁵⁹ *Annals*, p. 685. Camden (*Annals*, 1625, p. 392) names Sir Christopher Hatton in the list of the queen's attendant's. Stowe's account, I may add, is taken almost verbatim from a news-pamphlet, a copy of which I have seen at the Lambeth Palace Library.

"Eldertons advise to beginne the newe yere"⁶⁰ is, unfortunately, not extant, nor is his "Quake, Quake, it is Time to Quake, When Towers and Towns and all do Shake."⁶¹ The earthquake here referred to, which lasted "not passing one minute" frightened London badly on April 6, 1580. One enterprising journalist got out an extra, "a godly newe ballat moving us to repent by ye example of ye erthquake happened in London," on the very next day; four tracts and ballads appeared on the eighth, and two others on the eleventh. Peculiarly enough, Elderton's ballad was not licensed until April 25, by which time, of course, his news was stale. It is, however, the only publication dealing with the quake that was entered in the Registers with the name of its author, though from other sources we learn that broadsides and tracts on this subject were written by Francis Shackleton, Arthur Golding, Thomas Twine, Thomas Gittins, John Grafton, John Phillippes, Richard Tarlton, and Thomas Churchyard,⁶² some of them men of real importance in Elizabethan literature.

Meanwhile Elderton had rimed himself into the ears of the great. In "Master H^s. short, but sharpe, and learned Iudgement of Earthquakes," a letter written by Gabriel Harvey to Edmund Spenser, Elderton is twice referred to.

Assuming that the Irish exile would at once grasp the significance of the allusions, Harvey wrote.

And then forsoothe, must I desire Maister *Immerito* [i. e., Spenser], to send me within a weeke or two, some odde fresh paulding three halfe-pennie Pamphlet for newes: or some Balductum Tragicall Ballet in Ryme, and without Reason, setting out the right myserable, and most wofull estate of the wicked, and damnable worlde at these perillous dayes, after the deuisers best manner: or whatsoeuer else shall first take some of your braue London Eldertons in the Head; ⁶³

and again,

And then perhappes not longe after uppon newe occasion (an God will) I must be M. Churchyards and M. Eldertons successours tooe, and finally

⁶⁰ Registered on December 29, 1579 (Arber's *Transcript*, II, 363).

⁶¹ Registered on April 25, 1580 (*ibid.*, p. 369).

⁶² Cf. Collier's *Extracts from the Stationers' Registers*, II, 114.

⁶³ In *Three Proper and wittie, familiar Letters, Works*, I, 61-62.

croneycled for on of the most notorious ballat makers and Christmas carollers in the tyme of Her Maiestyes reigne."⁴⁴

Perhaps such a reputation would be little worse than that Harvey now bears. His jibes at Elderton here were later turned against him by Nashe with telling effect:

You that bee lookers on, perhaps imagine I talke like a merry man, and not in good earnest, when I say that *Eldertons* ghost and *Gabriel* are at such ods: but then you knowe nothing, for there hath beene a monstrous emulation twixt *Elderton* and him time out of mind. Yea, they were riuals in riming foure yeare before the great frost. Hee expressly writ against him, 1580. in his short but sharpe and learned iudgement of *Earthquakes*.⁴⁵

Ten months pass before we meet with Elderton again, but it is ridiculous to suppose that he had written nothing during this interval. His ballad called "A Reprehension against Green Sleeves,"⁴⁶ published in February, 1581, was his contribution to a ballad war that had raged since September of the preceding year, when two Green Sleeves ballads had appeared. Evidently these ballads were becoming more and more scurrilous as they increased in popularity; they deserved, no doubt, a reprehension, but it is hardly probable that Elderton's ballad was inspired by moral wrath. The "Reprehension" has not survived, and indeed the only Green Sleeves ballad now known is that included in Robinson's *Handefull of pleasant delites* (1584), "A new Courtly Sonet, of the Lady Greensleeues, to the new tune of Greensleeues." The tune is twice referred to by Shakespeare, and several times by Beaumont and Fletcher.

That Elderton's "Reprehension" indicated no personal dislike for the ballad is shown by the title of his next production, licensed on May 31, 1581: "A new Ballad declaring the great Treason conspired against the young King of Scots, and how one Andrew Browne, an Englishman, which was the Kings Chamberlaine, prevented the same. To the Tune of Milfield, or els to Green-sleaues." The ballad deals with two separate events, and narrates a history almost as fanciful as Greene's *James IV*. In the first few stanzas a nurse moans that the young king is about to be poisoned. Browne overhears her, comes upon the bishop who

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁵ *Works*, ed. McKerrow, I, 280.

⁴⁶ Arber's *Transcript*, II, 388; and cf. pp. 378, 379, 384, 400.

is carrying the poisoned posset, and forces him to drink it. The king shows his gratitude by giving the nurse an annuity of twenty pounds and by knighting Browne. The last two or three stanzas turn to something altogether different: a group of traitors decide to give a banquet

Whereat they ment to sell the Kinge,
beyond the seas it was decreede;

but three noble earls, headed by Morton, warn the conspirators that Elizabeth will not tamely see her godson "abused." With this covert threat the ballad ends.⁶⁷

Elderton was much too clever a writer to introduce superfluous episodes into his work: when he left the king in dire peril at the hands of his lords, he was merely trying to interest his readers so much that they would look forward to and buy the next instalment, the ballad in which he finished chronicling the perils of the king and the adventures of Browne. There is, to be sure, no mention anywhere that Elderton did write a sequel; but the ballad of "King of Scots and Andrew Browne,"⁶⁸ which (like the preceding ballad) somehow or other found its way into the Percy Folio Manuscript, is undoubtedly Elderton's work. It is a vivid piece of historical fiction. James VI is shown surrounded with traitors. Douglas and other rebel lords come to kill him, stopping on the way, for a moment, to try to bribe Browne with the offer of a marriage into the house of Douglas. Far from agreeing to this, Browne captures and imprisons his tempter. Douglas is soon pardoned by the king, once more plots treachery, but is again frustrated by the valorous young Englishman. James VI then sends for Browne, who modestly acknowledges his services to the king. I have saved you, says Browne, by capturing Douglas at Edinburgh, and by slaying the Sheriff's son of Carlisle:

⁶⁷ Unique printed copy in the Society of Antiquaries (*Harleian Miscellany*, x, 266; Child's *Ballads*, v, 445; Percy's *Reliques*, ed. Wheatley, II, 221, and all other editions). MS. version in the *Percy Folio MS.*, ed. Hales and Furnivall, II, 265. For registration, see Arber's *Transcript*, II, 393.

⁶⁸ Preserved only in the Percy Folio ms. (ed. Hales and Furnivall, I, 135); reprinted also in Child's *Ballads*, v, 442, where it is ballad No. 180. Though not entered in the Stationers' Registers, the ballad was evidently printed soon after May 30, 1581, when "The Great Treason" was licensed.

“ the 3d time I fought for you
 here for to let you vnderstand,
 I slew the bishopp of St Andrew[s],”
 quoth he, “ with a possat [in his hand].”

This is an obvious allusion to the chief incident of Elderton's first broadside.

The second ballad is a fairly good song, somewhat in the vein of the celebrated “Johnny Armstrong,” and is vicariously immortalized in Professor Child's collection of *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Although Mr. Child printed as an appendix to it the broadside version of Elderton's “Great Treason Conspired Against the Young King of Scots,” he made no comment on its authorship; so that all later writers insist that his collection contains only one ballad by a known author, Martin Parker's “True Tale of Robin Hood.”⁶⁹ But Elderton's authorship is indisputable: the ballad is his work, toned and improved by tradition. Those who doubt this statement may profitably compare the broadside version of “The Great Treason” with the version preserved in the Percy Folio ms., where the changes made in Elderton's work are exactly like those made in “King James and Browne.” No importance at all can be attached to the non-existence of a printed copy of “King James and Browne.” The events which each ballad describes are altogether too close in time with Elderton to favor the supposition that he had heard and written down traditional songs: instead, such “popular” features as appear in the ballad used by Mr. Child are due to the oral tradition that preceded and culminated in the Percy Folio copy. One cannot help imagining that ballad-singers delighted in caroling near Mary Stuart's prison a ballad “Concerning the Murder of the Late King of Scots,”⁷⁰ and Elderton's news of the dangers surrounding her son.

On July 4, Elderton was rejoicing over “Tyburn Tidings of Wat Fool and His Fellows, Of the Lamentable End They Made at the Gallows”;⁷¹ and a month later his “Answer to F. W.

⁶⁹ See, e. g., the introductory remarks to the Cambridge edition of Child's *Ballads*. Lawrence Price, by the way, wrote Child's Nos. 106 and 147, and other ballads in the collection are signed with the initials of their authors.

⁷⁰ Licensed on March 24, 1579 (Arber's *Transcript*, II, 349; cf. also p. 347).

⁷¹ Arber's *Transcript*, II, 396.

apprint" was tolerated to Edward White.⁷² Collier plausibly conjectured that "apprint" should read "apprentice," and that Elderton was replying to "A perswasion to Prentices and Serving men all, To ioyne like true frendes and leave their greate Brall," which had been tolerated to William Wright on July 26.⁷³ The "greate Brall" itself (of which Collier had never heard) is sufficiently explained by this record of an order of the Privy Council (July 10):

A letter to Sir Thomas Stanhopp, knight, requiringe him to geve order that one Lawe, his servaunt, late (as it is said) a goldsmith and citizen of London, and his lacky or page attendinge uppon him, beinge uppon examinacion of the matter charged to have ben th' occacion and beginninge of a certaine disorder and tumult of late happened in the Citie of London and places adjoyning by the prentises and other lewde persones, wherby some inconvenience might have happened unles some spedy order had ben taken for the apprehendinge and punishinge of some of th' offendours, maie forthwith be sent hither to make their apparaunce before their Lordships by the xxiiijth of this present [month], to th' intent their Lordships maie take such order therin as they shall thincke agreeable with lawe and justice.⁷⁴

Why did not Elderton address his ballad against Lawe—this prototype of Sim Tappertit, King of the 'Prentices?

On November 20 Edmund Campion and seven other Catholics were assigned for high treason: the charge was that they had left England, in obedience to the pope's command, and "the Pope hauing with other Princes, practised the death and depriuation of our most gracious Princesse, and utter subuersion of her state and Kingdome, to aduance his most abhominable religion," they had returned "to ayde him in this most trayterous determination."⁷⁵ They were convicted, sentenced to death, and Campion, Ralph Sherwin, and Alexander Brian were executed on December 1 at Tyburne. Soon after appeared *A true reporte of the death & martyrdome of M. Campion, Jesuite and preiste, & M. Sherwin & M. Bryan, preistes, at Tiborne the first of December 1581. Obseruid and written by a Catholike preist, which was present*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 399.

⁷³ Collier's *Extracts*, II, 151; Arber's *Transcript*, II, 397.

⁷⁴ *Acts*, ed. Dasent, XIII, 126 f.

⁷⁵ Stowe's *Annals*, p. 695.

therat.⁷⁶ It is primarily a bitter attack on Antony Munday, who boastfully claimed to have aided in the detection and capture of Campion and who certainly did write pamphlets about and testify against him. The irate author gives much choice biographical data about Munday, and also attacks "riming Elderton," George Eliot (who betrayed Campion), and others, "all worshipful writers at this time against the Preistes & Jesuites." Of Elderton he writes:

Fonde, *Elderton*, call in thy foolish rime,
thy scurile balates are to bad to sell;
let good men rest, and mende thy self in time,
confesse in prose thou hast not meetred well;
or, if thy folly can not choose but fayne,
write alehouse toys—blaspheme not in thy vain."

Munday replied in *A breefe Aunswer made vnto two seditious Pamphlets*, where only his defense of Elderton need concern us:

Yea, Elderton dooth deskant in his rime,
The high offences of such gracelesse men,
Which causeth him to yrke at everie crime,
And gainst their treasons to provide his pen;
Yet not without wisdom and modestie,
To warne all other that liue wickedlie.

It is interesting to see how good a "character" Munday gives him. Perhaps we have been too ready to believe the worst of Elderton, when Munday, a contemporary of considerable reputation, so highly praises his moral purpose in writing! At the time when this was written, however, Munday was the less popular of the two: his ballads, indeed, never came up to the standard of Elderton's, though in his later days of versatile and prolific hack-writing he became one of the most prominent minor figures in the literary world. He was no doubt closely associated with Elderton for a number of years, so closely that he came to be regarded as "Elderton's immediate heir."

On November 16, 1582, was registered "A new Yorkshyre Song, Intituled: Yorke, Yorke, for my monie,"⁷⁸ metrically one of the

⁷⁶ Furnivall's *Ballads from MSS.*, II, 157-191, prints all the pieces here discussed; see also Collier's *Bibl. Account*, I, 101.

⁷⁷ The specific ballad of Elderton's here attacked was perhaps "A gentle Iyrke for the Jesuit," licensed on February 13, 1581, later discussed.

⁷⁸ Licensed with Elderton's name (Arber's *Transcript*, II, 416). Reprinted

most fluent of Elderton's extant ballads, and invaluable for the light it throws on the news-gathering activities of the ballad-mongers. Elderton went to York as a special reporter to see the archery contest that was being held between the men of the Earl of Cumberland and the Earl of Essex; as "three Russian ambassadors" were guests, the occasion demanded the presence of London's premier balladist. Cumberland brought the three "best bowmen in the North countree," and Alderman Maltby with one Specke and Smith agreed to shoot for the Earl of Essex. Here is how Elderton tells the news:

The Earle of Cumberlands Archers won
Two matches cleare, ere all was done,
And I made hast apace to ronne
to carie these newes to London.

He especially praises Maltby, even though betting on Maltby cost him dearly. He remarks:

I passe not for my monie it cost,
Though some I spent, and some I lost.

He hopes that London will some day have the civic pride and co-operation between Mayor and Council so noticeable in York. The people of York were very kind to him, and therefore he will repay them in the only way possible:

In print shall this good shooting bee
as soone as I come at London.
And many a Song will I bestowe
On all the Musitions that I knowe,
To sing the praises, where they goe,
Of the Cittie of Yorke, in London.

What better press-agent could one desire? The ballad was long a favorite.

The last appearance of Elderton's name in the Stationers' Registers is in the registration of "The Yorkshire Song" (1582), and neither "Mary Ambree," an unsigned ballad almost certainly his,

in the *Roxburghe Ballads*, I, 1; Evans, *Old Ballads*, 1810, I, 20; Halliwell-Phillipps, *Yorkshire Anthology*, p. 1. Quoted in Heywood's *King Edward IV* (*Dramatic Works*, 1874, I, 45) and Brome's *Northern Lass* (*Works*, ed. Pearson, III, 25).

nor "The Lamentation of Folly,"⁷⁹ a ballad signed by him, can be definitely dated. Both of these in all probability had been printed by 1588. In "The Lamentation of Folly," Collier, though unaware that it is Elderton's last known work, felt a grave and melancholy tone, an unwonted seriousness. But such lines as,

Alas what meaneth man,
with care and greedy pain:
To wrest to win a wordy fame
which is but vile and vaine. . .
What surety is in man,
what truth or trust at all:
Which frameth what he can,
to work vnhappy thrall,
Oppression hath beene free,
the poore alas be spoyld,

could easily have been turned out by Elderton while in a fit of intoxication had his publisher demanded a moralizing ballad! Such ballads were written by dozens.

That Elderton took part in the Martin Marprelate controversy is proved by an anti-Marprelate tract, *Pappe with an hatchet* (1589), which is generally attributed to John Lyly. The author remarks:

I was once determined to write a proper newe Ballet, entituled *Martin and his Maukin*, to no tune, because *Martin* was out of all tune. *Elderton* swore hee had rimes lying a steepe in ale, which shoulde marre all your reasons: there is an olde hacker that shall take order for to print them. O how heele cut it, when his ballets come out of the lungs of the licour. They shall bee better than those of *Bonner*, or the ierkes for a Iesuit. The first begins, Come tit me come tat me, come throw a halter at me.

The marginal gloss on this passage is, "Hee sweares by his mazer, that he will make their wits wet-shod, if the ale haue his swift current."⁸⁰ The ballads of "Bonner" and "Come tit me, come tat me," here ascribed to Elderton, cannot be traced, but

⁷⁹ Unique copy at Britwell Court (Collmann's *Ballads*, No. 43; Collier's *Old Ballads*, pp. 45 ff.). Edward Alde, the printer of this ballad, secured his first license on August 1, 1586.

⁸⁰ Lyly's *Works*, ed. R. W. Bond, III, 398. In the note on this passage Bond refers to a tract of Harvey's (in which Elderton is mentioned as being dead in 1592) and says that Elderton died in 1606. He merely repeated the error made by Collier in his *History of English Dramatic Poetry*, I, 205.

"A gentle Iyrke for the Iesuit" which Richard Jones licensed on February 13, 1851, was undoubtedly his work.⁸¹

Elderton was perhaps alive in 1590, when he was vaguely referred to in Thomas Nashe's *Almond for a Parrot*:

We must not measure *Martin* as he is allied to *Elderton* or tongd like *Will Tony*, as he was attired like an Ape on ye stage, or sits writing of Pamphlets in some spare outhouse.⁸²

But by 1592 he was certainly dead, and his death preceded Robert Greene's. Camden is probably responsible for the belief that Elderton drank himself to death, and Oldys, with the remark that "he is believed to have fallen a victim to his bottle before the year 1592," did much to further it; until now the statement, familiar through constant repetition, is everywhere accepted as true. It has, nevertheless, a foundation in fact so slight as to be almost negligible. In the first place, Elderton's life was a long one. If we place his death at 1592, he lived forty-five years after his son was christened (if it *was* his son), and thirty-three years after his first ballad was licensed. In the second place, his reputation for drunkenness gained impetus from his jocular "New Merry News," with its insistence on red noses and tipping, and from the contemptuous remarks of Harvey and Nashe. Elderton no doubt drank ale to his utmost capacity, but Nashe likewise accuses Deloney of nourishing his muse on a penny-a-quart; Martin Parker wrote drinking songs of more than Eldertonian relevance and owed his supremacy among Caroline poets, so wrote a certain "S. F.," to bathing his beak in ale. If Elderton was a ridiculous drunkard, the same kind of evidence could make a confirmed toper out of nearly every other Elizabethan writer. Only Michael Drayton, says the *Return from Parnassus*,⁸³ was exceptional: he "wants one true note of a poet of our time, and that is this, he cannot swagger it well in a tavern, nor domineer in a hot house."

II

In his famous letter "To my louing frend, Maister Christopher Bird of Walden," describing the last unhappy days of Greene, Gabriel Harvey derived great satisfaction from coupling the

⁸¹ Arber's *Transcript*, II, 388.

⁸² McKerrow's *Nashe*, III, 354.

⁸³ Ed. Macray, p. 85.

novelist's name with that of Elderton. The first definite notice one has of Elderton's decease comes from Harvey's contemplative remark after he has described the squalid room in which, crowned with bays, lay the body of Robert Greene. "I know not," he says, "whether *Skelton*, *Elderton*, or some like flourishing Poet were so entered."¹ In classing the two men together Harvey seems to have been wholly sincere: the work of each appeared to him worthless, and for each he had keen resentment. "Who like *Elderton* for Ballating: *Greene* for pamphletting: both, for good fellowship, and bad conditions?" he asks. "Rayling was the Ypocras of the drunken rimester: and Quipping the Marchepane of the madde libeller."² Elderton and Green had undoubtedly been friends and intimates. Harvey characterizes them as "two notorious mates, & the very ringleaders of the riming, and scribbling crew . . . father *Elderton*, and his sonne *Greene*,"³ though as "neither [is] the vnhappiest creature vtterly deuoid of all graces," he professed to "praise somethinge in *Elderton*, and *Greene*."⁴ And while at one moment Elderton as a "bibbing foole" seems to be on a par only with Scoggin, "the Iouiall foole," or Skelton, "the Malancholy foole," or Will Sommers, "the chollericke foole,"⁵ at another moment Harvey ranks him quite frankly not only with Greene and Nashe but also with Lyly, Gascoigne, Turbervile, Drant, and with Martin Marprelate, whose "Ryme [was] forestalled by *Elderton*, that hath Ballats lying a steepe in ale."⁷ The epithet in Harvey's "Third Letter," "*Elderton's* ale-crammed nose,"⁸ afterwards plagiarized by Nashe, has immortalized the ballad-monger.

To the *Four Letters* Thomas Nashe replied with *Strange Newes* (1592), twitting Harvey with his "deepe meditation, and such as might well haue beseemed *Eldertons* parliament of noses to haue sit vpon,"⁹ but professing great indignation over Harvey's attack on the ballad-maker:

We are to vexe you mightely for plucking *Elderton* out of the ashes of

¹ Grosart's *Harvey*, I, 172.

² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 132.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58, 96, 129, 215-16; cf. also pp. 65, 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 201.

⁹ McKerrow's *Nashe*, I, 256.

his Ale, and not letting him inioy his nappie muse of ballad making to himselfe, but now, when he is as dead as dead beere, you must bee finding fault with the brewing of his meeters.

Hough *Thomas Delone, Phillip Stubbs, Robert Armin, &c.* Your father *Elderton* is abus'd. Reuenge, reuenge on course paper and want of matter, that hath most sacriligiously contaminated the diuine spirit & quinte-essence of a penny a quart.¹⁰

Needless to say, Nashe himself had no respect for Elderton or his "sons,"—Deloney, the second great professional balladist, Stubbs, best remembered for his *Anatomy of Abuses*, and Armin, pamphleteer and celebrated actor. The literary coterie which Elderton fathered also included the famous comedian Richard Tarlton. When Richard Harvey published his *Astrological Discourse*, it was, if Nashe is to be credited, received with infinite scorn: "The whole Vniuersitie hyst at him, *Tarlton* at the Theator made iests of him, and *Elderton* consumd his ale-crammed nose to nothing, in bearbayting him with whole bundles of ballets,"¹¹ "*Tarltons* and *Eldertons nigrum* THETA set to it."¹² Apparently Nashe knew Elderton personally, and from him, "a red nose Ballet-maker that resorted to our Printing-house,"¹³ learned several ballads.

While Nashe and Harvey were quarreling over Elderton and "his son Greene," one "Philip Foulface of Ale-foord, Student in good Fellowship," published *Bacchus Bountie* (1593), a humorous satire on drinking. What would have been more natural than that he should have held up our ale-crammed nosed gentleman as a shining, or as a fearful, example? But Master Foulface had a good opinion of Elderton's literary attainments. He pays Elderton the compliment of fitting a drinking song to the measure of "The Gods of Love" and places him in good company as he enters the "Pallace of good Bacchus." First are named the Gods and Emperors and Kings who flocked to the Bacchanalian revels; and "after these againe came stumbling in blind *Homer*, the *Grecian* Poet, and with him came *Aristophanes*, *Menander* and others; and along with these came *Virgil*, *Horace*, *Ouid*, old Father *Ennius*, *Geffery Chaucer*, *Lydgate*, *Anthony Skelton*, *Will. Elderton*, with

¹⁰ McKerrow's *Nashe*, I, 280.

¹¹ *Works*, I, 197.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹³ *Ibid.*, III, 133.

infinite mo, whose seuerall Names to rehearse were no les Labour, than to make . . . a Louse leap ouer the high Tops of *Maluerne Hills*." ¹⁴

Thomas Lodge, in 1596, added his share to the fame of Elderton's nose. In *VVits Miserie, and the VVorlds Madnesse*, Lodge is describing "the third Diuel incarnate, which LEUIATHAN hath brought forth to corrupt and haunt this world," namely, "Bosting"; and this is how he illustrates the Boasting Devil:

In the Stationers shop he sits dailie, Iibing and flearing ouer euery pamphlet with Ironicall ieasts; yet heare him but talke ten lines, and you may score vp twentie absurdities. . . . He hath an oare in euery mans boat; but turne him loose to write any Poeme, God amercie on the soule of his numbers: they are dead, dul, harsh, sottish, vnpleasant, yea ELDEERTONS nose would grin at them if they should but equall the worst of his Ballads.¹⁵

An insignificant satirist, Edward Guillpin, likewise uses Elderton to illustrate a point. In his *Skialetteia, Or, a shadowe of Truth, in certaine Epigrams and Satyres* (1598), he is lamenting that he came out on the streets instead of staying in his study to learn something. He sees a nobleman and his parasite drive by, and this is his description of the parasite:

He more perfections hath than y' would suppose,
He hath a wit of waxe, fresh as a rose,
He playes well on the treble Violin,
He soothes his Lord vp in his grosest sin
At any rimes sprung from his Lordships head,
Such as *Elderton* would not haue fathered:
He cries, *oh rare my Lord*.¹⁶

Even to academic Oxford had Elderton's reputation penetrated, and the students who wrote and performed the *Return from Parnassus* (circa 1598) were thoroughly familiar with his ballads and the fame of his nose! "To London I'le goe," the ballad-writer Luxurioso cries exultantly, "for there is a great nosde balletmaker deceaste, and I am promised to be the rimer of the citie."¹⁷ A more explicit reference, and one of high importance as affording a basis for believing Elderton to be the author of "Mary Ambree,"

¹⁴ *Harleian Miscellany*, II, 291.

¹⁵ Hunterian Club reprint, 1879, pp. 15-16.

¹⁶ Satyre V (Utterson's reprint).

¹⁷ *Parnassus Plays*, ed. Macray, p. 38.

comes later. "I am sure," Luxurioso tells his page, "my pen hath sweated through a quire of paper this laste weeke; and they are noe small verses like '*Captaine couragious, whome death coulde not daunte*' [the first line of "Mary Ambree"], but verses full of a poetically spirit, such that if Elderton were alive to heare (happie is he that is not alive to heare them, els!) his blacke potts shoulde put on mourninge apparell, and his nose for verie envie departe out of the worlde."¹⁸ "Mary Ambree," a virago and warrior whose feats are still a household word in England, would help to explain Elderton's contemporary fame. The ballad has never before been connected with him, but it seems not too daring to attribute the authorship to him, even on evidence so slight as Luxurioso's remark.

Obviously Elderton had been the undisputed leader of the balladists and pamphleteers of London. Nothing is better established than his intimacy with Greene and Munday, Tarlton and Deloney; and both his productions and his person were without doubt familiar to all contemporary men of letters. Nashe and Harvey knew him well; Lyly evidently regarded his ballads as no mean weapon for an assault on Marprelate; Hollyband was glad to print complimentary verses from his pen in the *Arnalt and Lucenda*; George Turberville paid his "Gods" the compliment of imitation. It is only reasonable to suppose that the great dramatists knew this ballad-maker not only from the broadsheets signed with his name that were littering the streets of London, but also because of his close connection with the theatres, sometimes as actor, again as manager, more often as reporter. No one can read Elizabethan pamphlets and plays, with their frequent insistent joking about huge or mottled bottle-noses, without feeling that somewhere is a colossal contemporary joke, a joke that may have originated with Elderton's own proboscis.¹⁹ Possibly Shakespeare created Bardolph,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁹ Cases in point are Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, I, i, 192 ff.:

"What shall your subject be?

"I care not much

If to his bounteous Grace I sing the praise

Of faire great noses, and to you of long ones."

And Shakespeare's *Troilus*, I, ii, 106: "I had as lieve *Hellens* golden tongue had commended *Troylus* for a copper nose." Dick Tarlton, too, was celebrated for his huge nose.

of the huge nose, with Elderton in mind. Certainly Shakespeare knew many of his songs, and quotes from them with gusto. Jonson and Dekker, Heywood and Marston, Fletcher and Webster,—practically all the dramatists put snatches of his ballads in their plays.

In court circles, too, Elderton was no less well known. The Privy Council on at least two occasions held sessions and dispatched orders concerning him, and among the gentlewomen of the court he was, for a time at least, a prime favorite. An extremely interesting production is the ballad "In Praise of My Lady Marques," addressed in most intimate terms to the court ladies. "I think you wonder, Ladies," he says, "why I write no merry reports, why I come not to Court, as I was wont. But, alas! the fairest lady of all, my own patroness, was not long ago, as you know well, taken away by death. Buried she lies in St. Paul's, where once a day I weep for her and pray for her soul: I have forgot all other sights that used to rejoice me at Court. Yet everywhere I deceive myself into thinking that I see her again, so sweet, so lovely, so graciously in interceding with the queen for the poor and oppressed. I could spend all my time in writing praises of my good lady. Reason tells me that there must be others her equal, but I can hardly believe it. Still I am sure that in the Court I shall find another patroness, unworthy as I am. Soon will I go to the Court to see. Meanwhile, gentle Ladies, do not blame me for my absence, but remember me when anything worth while turns up!" Without question Elderton here states facts; otherwise he should never have dared write so presumptuous a rimed letter, swift would have been the punishment meted out to him. Perhaps like Dick Tarlton he had won a welcome with his jests and buffoonery.

His ballads, spread abroad by hawkers and singers, were the vogue in Scotland no less than in the provincial towns of England. One of them, "The Pangs of Love," was so well known as to merit several religious parodies in the *Gude and Godlie Ballatis* of 1567, and to be included in the collection of songs and ballads made by the Scotchman George Bannatyne in about the same year.

It is surprising that Elderton remained in popular memory so long, when his successor as leader of the ballad-mongers was a capable writer like Deloney. The latter, though perhaps producing better ballads than Elderton, had little of his picturesqueness,

and hence is seldom mentioned by his contemporaries. His sense of news-values, however, was extremely acute. That was why William Kemp, angry at ballads that had been written about him, in 1600 penned his *Nine Days' Wonder*, viciously attacking Deloney, whom he had wrongly suspected. Kemp "was let to wit," he tells us, "y^t another Lord of little wit [Antony Munday], one whose employment for the Pageant was vtterly spent, he being knowne to be Eldertons immediate heyre, was vehemently suspected";²⁰ but, forced to exonerate Munday, he fastened the blame on an unnamed ballad-writer usually identified with Richard Johnson. Only a short time before, Munday had been burlesqued in Jonson's *Case Is Altered*, and Kemp's words are important as showing how general was the idea of Munday's insignificance. His long friendship with Elderton made the connection of their names inevitable. The tract also shows the contempt that even a low comedian felt for ballad-writers.

William Camden published his *Remaines of a Greater Worke concerning Britaine* in 1605, and in that book forever enshrined Elderton in ridicule. It concludes with a list of epitaphs (most of them made, he says, by John Hoskins), among which occurs this passage:

*Thomas*²¹ *Elderton*, who did arme himselfe with Ale (as ould Father *Ennius* did with Wine) when he ballated, had this, in that respect made to his memorie.

*"Hic situs est sitiens atque ebrius Eldertonus,
Quid dico hic situs est? hic potius sitis est."*

Of him also was made this:

*"Here is Elderton lyeng in dust,
Or lyeing Elderton, chose which you lust.
Here he lyes dead, I doe him no wrong,
For who knew him standing, all his life long."*²²

Elderton's burial-place is unknown, and these epitaphs were made only as jokes. Many years later Oldys added to the merriment by translating the Latin epitaph,

²⁰ Dyce's reprint, p. 21.

²¹ The error in name is automatically corrected by what follows.

²² *Remaines*, 1605, p. 56 (appendix called "Certaine Poems, or Poesies," etc.). The epitaph is also in MS. Ashmole 38, fol. 130.

Dead drunk here *Elderton* does lie;
Dead as he is, he still is *drie*:
 So of him, it may well be said,
 Here *he*, but not his *thirst*, is laid; ²²

and this has been inserted in many a collection of epitaphs intended to "amuse the reader."²⁴ Indeed, almost the only serious allusion made to Elderton is found in Michael Drayton's "Elegy to Henry Reynolds" (1627), where, telling of his boyish devotion to true poetry, Drayton declares,

I scornd your ballet then though it were done
 And had for Finis, *William Elderton*.²⁵

Drayton was writing at a time when Elderton's glory had faded and Martin Parker's was rising; but he, like every other Elizabethan, considered Elderton the balladist *par excellence*.

While several of his ballads retained their popularity, Elderton's name was being forgotten, or was remembered chiefly because of the tradition of his red nose, which like a star beacons from abodes where he and Greene and Deloney were. The author of an amusing pamphlet, *A Brown Dozen of Drunkards* (1648), knew of Elderton both as a wine-bibber and as a poet. His first drunkard, Wimble-tree, "staggers in his motions . . . as once drunken *Elderton* in his Potions." But the eighth drunkard, Don Quixot, is described as rivalling "his Predecessors *Tom Nash*, *George Peale*, *Kit Marlow*, *John Green*, old *Elderton*, *Churchard* (buried with *Alectoes* torch in the Church-Porch) fantastique

²² *Biographia Britannica*, 1793, article "Drayton," v, 359.

²⁴ E. g., *A Collection of Epitaphs . . . to which is prefixed An Essay on Epitaphs* by Dr. Johnson, 1806, I, 89. In Sloane ms. 1792, p. 24, there is an epitaph

"On Mrs Mallet vnmasked.

"Skelton some rimes and Elderton a ballet

Hers theame enough fors all, her Maddam Mallet."

These same lines occur again in Sloane ms. 1446, fol. 26v.

²⁵ *Minor Poems*, ed. Cyril Brett, Oxford, 1907, p. 109. A spurious "Toy of Elderton," beginning "Will Elderton's red nose is famous everie where," is preserved in one of Colliers MSS. (of which there is a copy in the Harvard Library): cf. his *Extracts*, II, ix. It was quoted unsuspectingly by Chappell (*Popular Music*, I, 107) and by Collmann (*Ballads and Broad-sides*, p. 112).

Fenner, and the rest of the pottizing Poetizing fraternity.”²⁷ For once Elderton’s capacity for ale and poetry has overshadowed his nose!

In 1651 jolly old John Taylor, the Water Poet, wrote a whimsical tract called *Ale Ale-vated into the Ale-titude*. After exhausting himself (and his readers) in ale-vating ale, he concludes with the note, “For your better Recreation heere followeth some Lines in praise of ALE, written in merrier Times, by a most Learned Authour.” He then prints the poetical *Ex-Ale-tation of Ale, the ancient Liquor of this Realme* (which is attributed to Francis Beaumont and included in his poems in Chalmers’s *English Poets*, VI, 205), with this notice of Elderton,

For Ballads *Elderton* never had Peer,
How went his Wit in them, with how merry a gale,
And with all the Sails up, had he been at the Cup,
And washed his Beard with a Pot of good Ale.²⁸

It may have been with Elderton in mind that his successors in ballad-writing so often sang the praises of ale and its effect in reddening noses! But the Civil War effectually eclipsed the fame of Elderton, and when Oliver Cromwell came into power, he had a shiny red nose himself on which balladists and pamphleteers expended much of their energy.²⁹ None was left for Elderton, and his very name survived not so much from his ballads as from the mention made of him in the works of Harvey and Nashe and Camden and Stowe. Nevertheless, *Merlinus Anonymus* (1655, sig. A 4^v) included in a list of “some things very memorable, til this Year 1655” a statement that “Elderton (*that Prince of Poets*) wrot *His famous volumn cald*, beware the Cat.” This “vol-

²⁷ Sig. A 3 and C 2.

²⁸ The poem is reprinted also in *A Collection of Old Ballads*, 1725, III, 166, and in *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 1661, p. i ff. It has been reprinted separately by T. Badger in 1646 (Thomason Collection, British Museum), but the stanza on Elderton was omitted in a reprint of 1642 called “The High and Mightie Commendation of the vertue of a Pot of good Ale.” It was registered for publication as a ballad on June 22, 1629, December 30, 1639, and June 3, 1671.

²⁹ Cf. the *London Spy* (1709, p. 96), who in Cheapside met “an old Fellow with a Nose (Bless my Eye-sight!) ’twas as . . . big at the ende as a Foot-Ball, beset with Carbuncles and Rubies; no *Olivers* Nose could have appear’d more Glorious.”

umn," or ballad, was registered in 1577, and is unknown. When William Winstanley compiled his *Lives of the most Famous Poets* (1687), in the dedication, with the logic and discrimination to be expected of a plagiarist and a barber, he used Elderton to illustrate the power of poetry. "How," he exclaims, "are the Names forgotten of those mighty Monarchs, the Founders of the *Egyptian Pyramids*, when that *Ballad-Poet*, Thomas³⁰ Elderton, who did arm himself with Ale (as old Father *Ennius* did with Wine) is remembered in Mr. *Camden's Remaines*?"

The years pass by with "that ballad-poet" still the object of admiration, amusement, or contempt, according to the disposition and knowledge of the antiquary or student who comes across his path. Students of Elizabethan literature, blissfully unaware of the real importance of balladry to a full understanding of the times and the drama, customarily dismiss Elderton with a scornful line or two. Thomas Park, for example, remarks, "Elderton the ballad-maker was equally notorious for his vile rhimes and his dissolute life; both of which made him a congenial companion to the unfortunate Robert Greene, and other 'wanton wittes' of that class."³¹ Ritson, in spite of his innate acerbity, was more kindly: after reading only two of his ballads, Ritson called him "the peerless Elderton."³² An impressionable German student, briefly sketching Elderton's career, remarks, "Nach dem ubereinstimmenden Urteil seiner Zeitgenossen war er ein vielseitiger, begabter Dichter, zugleich aber auch ein Trunkenbold und verkommennes Genie!"³³ While, as if to put a stop to the unseemly laughter of three centuries, Dr. Grosart, capping the climax, pronounces, "Elderton's 'ballats' have sparks of genius and a certain Drydenic ring, and [are] not without touches of strange penetrativeness."³⁴ For our own part, we frankly confess to amusement in dealing with Elderton.

³⁰ The error in name shows that Winstanley knew nothing of Elderton save what he found in Camden's passage.

³¹ *Harleian Miscellany*, 1813, x, 269.

³² *Ancient Songs*, I, xc.

³³ Paul Wolter, *William Fullwood*, 1907, p. 8.

³⁴ *Poems of Bishop Hall*, p. 266.

III

Only a small proportion of Elderton's work has been preserved. Seventeen ballads or broadsides signed with his name are extant; but to these should be added "King James and Browne" from the Percy Folio ms., "Mary Ambree," the long poetical "New Merry News" (also signed), the complimentary verses prefixed to Holyband's *Arnalt and Lucenda*, and the fourteen verses preserved in Stowe's *Survey of London*,—a total of but twenty-two separate works. Many others, however, can be traced: twelve non-extant ballads were entered under his name in the Stationers' Registers;¹ he is known to have written "A Ballad against Marriage," "The Gods of Love," "A Ballad of a Parrot," as well as one or more ballads against the hosier Leach, Edmund Campion, the pope, Richard Harvey, and possibly Gabriel Harvey; finally, Lyly credits him with a ballad against Bishop Bonner, "Jerkes for a Jesuit," and an anti-Marprelate ballad beginning, "Come tit me, come tat me, come throw a halter at me"; while Nashe speaks of "Meeting the Devil in Conjure-House Lane"² in such a connection as to make that seem to be the title of a ballad by Elderton.

But the number so traced is absurdly small:³ Elderton wrote in the period from 1559 to 1590, and it is inconceivable that the number indicated represents at all fairly his volume of work. In fourteen years (1586-1600) Thomas Deloney wrote some eighty ballads that are extant, as well as four or five novels. Yet, considering the centuries that have elapsed and the perishable form in which Elderton's rhymes were printed, one is lucky to be able to trace even these few. His name is mentioned in the Stationers' Registers sixteen times; but three of these entries are for works presumably written about him, and only two ("Northumberland News" and "York for my Money") are for extant ballads. Of

¹ "Eldertons ell fortune" is here included, although it was probably written about, not by, him.

² *Works*, ed. McKerrow, I, 133.

³ It is, however, very much larger than any other list heretofore given. Hazlitt (*Index to Hazlitt's Collections and Notes*, s. v. "Elderton") succeeded in tracing only 29 separate titles, but he included several works that, like the ballad of "The Constancy of Susanna," have wrongly been attributed to Elderton.

his other extant ballads eight were licensed without his name, six were unlicensed, or at least were not recorded in the Registers. The inference that many more likewise escaped the Registers is inevitable; while others that he wrote, entered in the Registers without his name, have disappeared or can be traced to him only by a circumstance as lucky as that which enables me to establish his authorship of "A gentle Iyrke for the Iesuit."

Examining the ballads that are happily existent, one is struck by the preponderance among them of a journalistic type. Several, indeed, like "The Monstrous Child" and "Bishop Jewell," are news-stories pure and simple, were not intended for singing, and cannot properly be called ballads. Most of the others have for subjects events of local or national significance, and are by no means despicable even to-day in the eyes of students of manners, customs, and history. The woeful ballad on Thomas Appletree, for example, is a contemporary document of as real importance as are the sober and abbreviated passages dealing with the same event in Stowe and Camden. And the psychology of the common people is far more trustworthily revealed in Elderton's ballads of the Rising in the North than in the dull pages of those chroniclers.

First of all, then, Elderton was a journalist. He lived in a stirring time when plots and counter-plots and wars and rumors of wars absorbed men's minds; in a time, too, when poetry was represented by such hopeless dilettantes as Turberville, Gascoigne, and Whetstone. It was natural that, ignorant of what real poetry should be, Elderton, a loyal subject of the queen and a devoted Protestant, should have devoted much of his time to writing down enemies of Church and queen with his Smithfield songs. All of them have the unmistakable ring of sincerity, and among the lower classes they made their author a man of influence and power.

Only three or four ballads are purely lyrical. His earliest successes, "The Pangs of Love" and "The Gods of Love," in print by 1562, are in a smooth, well chosen, and attractive metre which he seems not to have attempted again save in the famous "Mary Ambree" and in "York for My Money," a splendid song that, in spite of its ephemeral subject-matter, was for years deservedly remembered. These four ballads and the "Merry News" might account for a brief vogue, but they can hardly explain why Elderton was so universally admired and despised as

the prince of ballad-mongers. That his striking personality, his intimate connection with the stage and the literary men of the time, his pretensions to the higher fields of law and acting, his familiarity at court, and the incessant ridicule of contemporary writers had much to do with this reputation will, of course, be readily admitted. But a truer explanation undoubtedly is that very many of his most popular songs have perished. Stephen Peele occasionally wrote ballads on current events quite as well as Elderton, but who knows Peele? It is obvious that quantity, as well as quality, of production gained distinction for the ballad-monger, and it is equally obvious that, if other works from his facile pen like "A New Merry News" were extant, Elderton would have no mean place in current histories of Elizabethan stage-craft.

As real poetry his ballads will necessarily merit no consideration. But who can deny that he is pleased by the jingle of

The god of love
That sits above,
And knows me, and knows me,
How pitiful I deserve?

And even the melody of the ridiculous refrain of "Thomas Apple-tree,"

Weepe, weepe, still I weepe and shall doe till I dye
To thinke upon the gun was shot at court so dangerously,

is appealing. Ballads are to be judged not as poetry but as songs written to be sung in the streets for the information, edification, or amusement of the lowest classes; and, though Elderton shows all the faults of such a form, he always has the merit of tunefulness. It can hardly be disputed that his rhymes are often quite equal to those from the more exalted pens of the *Tottel's Miscellany* authors. The most appalling lines in Elderton's extant work,

And Abraham rendes his clothes, and bowells out his brest,
And sayth to Iuell iumpe in here, and take thye quiet rest,

are certainly as poetical, say, as these lines from George Turberville's *Tragical Tales*,

Put case the snow be thicke, and winter frostes be great:
I doe not doubt but I shal finde a stoue to make me sweat.

Elderton's ballads are products of a very low kind of art; but his

feeling for rhythm, his tunefulness, usually triumphed over innate prosiness.

His reputation for scurrility and licentiousness is apparently unjustified; it is certainly unjustified by the ballads that we know, all of which are highly moral. Nor, with the exception of "*The Monsterous Chylde*," is there anything of the vulgar or sensational. An explanation, of course, may be that the vulgar, sensational, and indecent part of his work is lost; for it really is too much to believe that he did not answer in kind such broadsides as those William Fulwood fired at him. Furthermore, bountiful evidence has already been advanced to prove that much of his published work was unlicensed, and unlicensed publication was the natural course for licentious or libelous ballads. On assumptions like these one can explain the frequent condemnation of his rhymes as filthy; but for that matter many persons, modern as well as Elizabethan, have regarded every ballad printed on broadsheets and sold by professional singers as filthy. It is remarkable in how attractive a light Elderton's few ballads reveal him.

Unlike Deloney with his novels, Elderton has no other peg than balladry on which to hang his petition for a humble place in literary history. And for balladry alone his petition cannot be granted. Both Martin Parker and Deloney wrote ballads that are more poetical than his and are yet almost unknown to literature. Of his prominence in the Elizabethan period, however, there can now be no doubt; and as his part in the early drama was not altogether valueless, as his association with the great names of English poetry is well established, as his ballads themselves are valuable for history and amusing to read, it has perhaps not been altogether useless to have emulated Harvey by plucking Elderton out of the ashes of his ale.

London.